



## 6 College Essay Mistakes and How to Fix Them

All students make mistakes when they sit down to write their college essays — but they don't make the same mistakes. Below are seven of the most common:

**1. Wasting time choosing the "right" topic or "perfecting" an essay.** The students with the highest GPAs and test scores don't necessarily write the best essays. Why not? Many of these kids waste time looking for the perfect topic, or tinker with their essay for weeks; it's as frustrating as driving in circles.

**2. Skipping the revisions.** One of the biggest mistakes students make is procrastinating, then rushing to finish the essay, leaving no time for revisions. This rarely ends well. When it comes to college application essays, you can't expect to write one draft and be done. As the author Cheryl Strayed once said, "I write to find out what I have to say. I edit to figure out how to say it right."

**3. Writing a boring essay.** Because many students have not been taught how to write personal essays (it's not required by the Common Core), there's a learning curve, and it can be confusing. Students sometimes fall back on what they do know how to write — the five-paragraph essay. The result: a lackluster, predictable essay that doesn't give any insight into who they are or what's important to them. That is not how to impress an admissions officer tasked with reading dozens of essays every day.

**4. Writing an autobiography.** Many students try to squeeze too much information into the essay, telling their life story, or worse yet, listing achievements in chronological order. The college essay is *not* an autobiography. *When you are coming up with essay ideas, think in terms of moments in your life, not your life story.*

**5. Choosing to go it alone or asking the wrong person for help.** It's rare for a student to ace an admissions essay without any help. While most students ask someone to check their college application essay for grammar and punctuation before they hit send, larger problems loom with many essays in terms of content, tone, and message. Self-editing a college essay is a bit like cutting your own hair — it's hard to pull off. Likewise, there are a lot of "experts" offering college application essay tutoring services who can identify a lousy essay — but they don't know how to help students find and tell their stories.

**6. Relying too much on your parents.** Don't want to offend anyone, but ...parents can steer students in the wrong direction. Most commonly, they urge students to write essays that read like cover letters sent to corporate HR offices. Reminder: A college essay is not a summary of your accomplishments. [Take a look at this \*NY Times\* piece, "How I Know You Wrote Your Kid's College Essay."](#)